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ABSTRACT

Two basic reasons for including Oral Language Development in the instructional program are (1) to prepare students for reading instruction, and (2) to teach students how to communicate effectively in real-life situations. A child is expected to have had five or six years oral practice in a language before learning to read. When children have developed their linguistic skills in Spanish, they should first learn to read in that language. Proponents of Title I Migrant and ESAA programs have emphasized oral language development in programmatic guidelines. However, guidelines for various state and federal programs differ, and they should be examined carefully in light of each school district's goals. An oral language program must identify students who will benefit most from the program and also select its administrator and teachers with care. Effective implementation of an oral language program calls for a sensitive teacher, thorough planning, support of administrators and fellow teachers, adequate materials and resources, an assistant (if possible), and staff development based on teacher requests. (Author/JG)

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A PERSPECTIVE OF ORAL LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT IN FEDERAL PROGRAMS

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In recent years several programs have been established which include activities for oral language development as one of the requirements for funding: ESEA Title I, Title I Migrant, Title III, Title VII, ESAA and Senate Bill 121 of the State of Texas. Some of these requirements are explicit, as in Title I Migrant, others are implied, as in the bilingual programs.

Incorporation of oral language into these programs generally fall into three major areas: English-as-a-Second-Language, oral language development and oral language development as a part of bilingual education.

Rationale for Oral Language Development

There are two basic reasons for including Oral Language Development in the instructional program: preparation for reading and effective communication in real life situations. Most first grade reading texts include somewhere in their introduction the statement that children come to school knowing the basic structures of their language and using a vocabulary of several thousand words. This is the assumption upon which text writers base their materials; educators who write textbooks know that well-developed oral language is a prerequisite for learning to read.

A child is expected to have had 5 or 6 years oral practice before learning to read in a language. When children have developed their linguistic skills in Spanish, they should first learn to read in that language and/or spend much additional time in developing oral language skills in English before attempting to read English. Fortunately, the proponents of Title I Migrant and ESAA recognize this disparity and

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have emphasized oral language development in programmatic guidelines. The bilinbual programs, both under Title VII and the State Senate Bill 121, propose that a student whose oral language development has been in Spanish should also begin his reading instruction in that language.

Another important reason to spend time helping students develop their oral language is the fact that effective communication is essential whether we are students, salesmen, or supervisors; in short, no matter what our occupation, we can accomplish our goals more easily if we communicate effectively. We use oral language skills daily to persuade, convince, explain, report, express our feelings, etc. (Each of us spend approximately 75% of our time listening and speaking to one another and only 25% reading and writing.) Students need help in developing these skills effectively.

Many teachers will say that getting kids to talk is no problem at all; their problem is making them be quiet. However, encouraging, modeling, and expanding children's language so they can express more and more complicated ideas is a valid goal, as is teaching them to listen to appreciate or analyze and make judgements about what they hear (not to mention following directions.) A good language development program looks at language primarily from a functional point of view: why one needs language, rather than its linguistic elements. It also sets realistic objectives to help children develop and use their language more effectively.

Although guidelines for the various State and Federal Programs may allow for establishing English-as-a-Second-Language, Oral Language Development, or Bilingual/Multicultural Education programs, each of these has a different focus, and they should be examined carefully in light of a district's own goals. These three

programs, however, are not mutually exclusive; a district may successfully carry out one or more approaches at the same time. A chart on the opposite page describes the different elements of each program.

A Review of Elements of Oral Language Development, English as a Second Language, and Bilingual Education Programs		
English as a Second Language	Oral Language Development	Bilingual Education
Traditionally taught as a separate subject with techniques based on the audio-lingual method, originally developed for secondary students and adult learners. Most programs are highly structured.	Oral language may be developed in one or more languages. Activities are based on the natural process of language learning: imitating, expanding, creating. Oral language may be a separate subject or the methods and techniques can be incorporated into regular classes throughout the day.	Instruction in two languages Oral language development in two languages Specific activities and drills for the learning of English may be included. English and Spanish language arts are taught Oral language development in English preceeds reading instruction in English Emphasis is also placed on respect for cultural differences.

Program Implementation

A project which has been funded to provide an oral language program must identify students who will benefit most from the program. This is done under Title I and ESAA Guidelines on the basis of parent income, and in the case of Title I Migrant, whether or not parents are seasonally employed in agriculture. For the bilingual programs, however, a language assessment is made, either subjectively by the

teacher and/or principal, or more objectively with one of the many language assessment instruments (information on available instruments may be obtained from the Texas Education Agency or Center for the Management of Innovation in Multicultural Education). A project also needs to select its administrator and teachers with care; these people must feel their job is an important one.

The effective implementation of an oral language program calls for several things: a sensitive teacher, thorough planning, support of administrators and fellow teachers, materials and resources, an assistant (if possible), and staff development based on teacher requests.

A sensitive teacher will be able to estimate where her students need help and she can incorporate students' real life experiences into her lesson plans. She has an idea of basic vocabulary and sentence patterns her students should master, and she sets up meaningful situations in which to introduce, practice, and improvise with new language forms.

Thorough planning allows her to set some realistic goals for her students based on where they are, and it allows her to use the materials and resources she has available more effectively.

If hers is a pull-out program, administrative support is essential. Some teachers may feel that all the kids do in oral language class is talk and play. If the principal, project director and/or teacher can take the time to inform other teachers of the specific goals, objectives and activities of the program, her job will be easier.

Oral language development usually consists of a 30-45 minute segment of a student's school day; however, listening and speaking skills are developed throughout the day, and in fact, throughout one's life. The more effective communicators we are, the more control we have over our lives.

Materials and resources may take any form. If the program is based on communicating in real life situations, materials may be almost anything. The book, The Yellow Pages of Learning Resources, includes many excellent suggestion. Other materials which are particularly useful are Lexikits and Lexilogs, developed by the Riverside, California, ESEA Title III project. The MIME Center and consultants from local regional service centers can recommend and demonstrate many others. Community members as well as school personnel can be excellent resources.

Including oral language development in bilingual programs requires a different focus and a different perspective. Oral language in this instance refers to two languages, not one, although the objectives are much the same: preparation for reading in each language, and acquisition of effective communication skills, also in each language. The bilingual program includes many other elements as well, and a good program incorporates the development of effective speaking and listening skills into all its activities.